



Matthew 8:14–17

14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. 16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through

the prophet Isaiah:

“He took up our infirmities
and bore our diseases.”

Reflection

Jesus performs nine miracles in Matthew chapters eight and nine. Matthew has hand selected them from the ministry of Jesus in order to teach us more about this man who has stunned us with his authority in the Sermon on the Mount. We've seen two of the nine. Two healings. A desperate leper, an outcast from Jewish society, his leprosy and uncleanness representing his sin and shame. No-one touches lepers; except Jesus. If you touch a leper you become unclean; as if you take their sin upon yourself. That's what Jesus is all about. Taking the sin of others upon him-

self and declaring them clean in the sight of God through faith in his name. He did it for a leper. And then he did it for the nameless servant of a Gentile again through faith in his name. Hand selected miracles demonstrating Jesus' authority and power but most importantly demonstrating the gospel. A gospel not just for Jews, but for those marginalised in Jewish society as well; for lepers, for gentiles, and today for women. A gospel not just for Jews but for everyone, for people from every nation and walk of life.

From lepers, to Gentiles to women. Peter's married. His wife's mother is sick. She's lying in bed with a fever. She lives in Peter's house, his wife is no doubt very distressed, Peter himself no doubt worried, and so he asks Jesus to come. You see although we

know it as a symptom, the ancient world treated a fever as a disease, and it was the biggest killer in the ancient world. The expression behind 'lying in bed' comes from the more violent original which reads 'she was thrown on a bed' by her fever. In it there's the implication that Peter's mother-in-law is at death's door. The shadow of death is over Peter's household and so he calls Jesus.

As we're seeing from these first three stories in Matthew chapter eight life was fragile in the ancient world. In Jesus' day average life expectancy was around 25 years of age. It wasn't that people didn't occasionally live to very old ages but the average was so low because infant mortality ran at about 50% with many mothers also dying while giving birth. And then as we

see in today's passage, even a common cold or a fever was more often than not a death sentence. This isn't even to speak of wars and uprisings and the mistreating of slaves and the like. In the ancient world death was writ large, an inevitable part of the day to day.

Enter Jesus into a world like this. Is it any wonder then that the crowds came to him in their thousands? To one who could heal lepers by the touch of his hand, to one who could heal terrible suffering with a word? To the one who claimed that he had come to rid the world of Satan, sin and death and then backed up his words with his works by proving that he had power over death by saving people from it like Jesus does in today's passage.

Peter's mother-in-law is dying and Jesus reaches out and touches her hand and instantly she's healed. The verse is so matter-of-fact, next thing we know she's up and waiting on Jesus, bringing him food to eat and something to drink. It's a beautiful picture of the gospel isn't it? Jesus comes to us in our hour of need, through faith in his name we're healed, and through him we receive the inestimable gift of eternal life. Then we spend the rest of our natural lives helping him, as our response, in his mission, even if it seems like we're helping even in only the smallest of ways. Jesus has saved her life; in response she serves him as best as she can with what she has. What a beautiful gospel picture in a single verse!

Matthew brings these three miracles to-

gether with a quote from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. If the Sermon on the Mount left us with the question ‘who is this man,’ Matthew’s carefully crafted account is trying to prove to us beyond all doubt that Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised One, God’s anointed king, the saviour of the world come to inaugurate and ultimately reign over the kingdom of God. Isaiah prophesied about him as one who would:

“...take up our infirmities
and bear our diseases.”

Matthew shows us that this prophecy, like all the other ones he’s pointed out in the early chapters of his gospel, is fulfilled in Jesus.

Think

Take some time now to meditate over the words of Matthew 8:14 to 17. Death was writ large back then; it's writ small today. We block it out, we pretend it won't happen to us, we've pushed it out of our everyday, hidden our elderly and frail – and yet we take vitamins, and watch our diets, and count our steps, and have cosmetic surgery; some of us run long distances or cycle many miles, and all in the unspoken hope of living that little bit longer, holding off death for a few more years. Vain little grabs at eternal life while never stopping for long enough to wonder why we long so much for eternal life. Why death feels so wrong, so unnatural, so tragic. Why our bodies age but our minds feel timeless. Countless hours on a treadmill but

not a moment of time to investigate the possibility of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. We have in front of us eye-witness testimony from people who knew all about death. It bears witness to one who demonstrated power over death, he healed some, he raised others from the dead and then ultimately he rose himself from the death to offer eternal life to all who put their trust in his name. Consider Christ, and how he meets the unspoken needs our culture's endless and futile pursuit of eternal life through other means. How can you bring our culture and Christ together, even in small ways today?

Prayer

To close, spend some time praying about these thoughts. Pray for those you love,

and those you know, and those you don't yet know who live in silent fear of death and have no hope in this world. The shadow of death is over their households so call on Jesus like Peter did. Pray for opportunities to introduce them to Jesus so that they can be free from slavery to sin and treadmills (!) and fear and death. And pray that you might respond to Jesus like Peter's mother-in-law and do anything you can, straight away and no matter how small it may seem, to help Jesus in his mission on earth.